



# News Release

## US Army Corps of Engineers®

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## Final Report: Mississippi River Commission “low-water” inspection trip

Vicksburg, Miss., August 29, 2003 -- The Mississippi River Commission (MRC) concluded its annual low-water inspection trip August 22, 2003, on a successful note hearing testimony at seven public hearing locations from St. Paul, Minn., to Morgan City, La. Almost 400 citizens attended the public hearings and a total of 102 members of the public either testified or submitted testimony for the record.

The purpose of the Mississippi River Commission’s inspection trips is to allow commission member’s access to the public along the length of the entire Mississippi watershed. The MRC conducts two trips annually, a high-water inspection trip in the spring along the lower portion of the Mississippi River, and the low-water inspection trip along the entire length of the river during traditional low-water periods in late summer or early fall. During each of these inspections, the MRC sets objectives of listening to the public, meeting with key partners, inspecting and reviewing major projects, reviewing watershed planning guidelines and educating the public on the role of the commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition to highlighting the role of the commission, Brig. Gen. Don T. Riley, President-designee for the Mississippi River Commission and commander of the Mississippi Valley Division Corps of Engineers, explained to the public why the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in partnership with the MRC is important to the nation.

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“The Corps is perfectly positioned to take the lead in balancing the challenging requirements of economic, environmental, and social needs throughout the entire watershed,” said Riley. “It is our duty as the nation’s engineers to produce the best science and engineering, to maintain our integrity and the integrity of the process, and to do what is right for the nation’s watershed resources.”

Throughout the entire MRC inspection trip, those words echoed by Riley were evident in the general themes resulting from the public meetings. Those themes were:

- Expressions of strong support of locks and dams expansion for navigation and expressions that barge transportation is the safest, most environmentally friendly, and efficient means of transportation.
- Request to the commission for a more aggressive stance on funding requirements and system improvements.
- Concern over the increasing the size of Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, at the expense of division offices which would result in less effective partnering. They are concerned that key relationships and the mutual understanding of needs would be diminished.
- The need for flood control remains on the top of the agenda of needs for the majority of the people that live and work in the Mississippi Valley.

The projects and studies that the Mississippi River Commission observed, reviewed and heard testimony on during this inspection trip, are producing an example of balanced flood control, navigation and environmental needs.

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The Mississippi River Commission, organized in 1879, is composed of seven members, each nominated by the President of the United States and confirmed by the Senate. Three of the organization's members are officers of the Corps of Engineers; one member is from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and three members are civilians, two of whom are civil engineers.

General duties of the commission include recommendation of policy and work programs, the study of and reporting upon the necessity for modifications or additions to the flood control and navigation project, recommendation upon any matters authorized by law, and making semi-annual inspection trips. The duties of the commission, as established in 1879, included the entire length of the Mississippi River from its headwaters at Lake Itasca, Minn., to Head of Passes, La., where the Mississippi River empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

The purpose of the public meetings is to maintain a dialogue, an exchange of viewpoints and ideas flowing between the public and the Corps. Presentations by the public are made orally, but a copy of the remarks should be presented to the commission for the official record.

The public hearing process is unique to the Mississippi River Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The benefits of hearing first hand the issues and concerns through the public hearing process are invaluable to the commission and the Corps. Also, the interaction with congressional, federal and state interests, local boards and non-government organizations and the public is crucial to the decision making process of the Commission.